


Pronoun Agreement

Rule 1: Know the *general* rule governing pronoun agreement.



A pronoun must agree with its *antecedent*.



The *antecedent* is the *noun* [or other pronoun] being *replaced*.

Here are two examples:

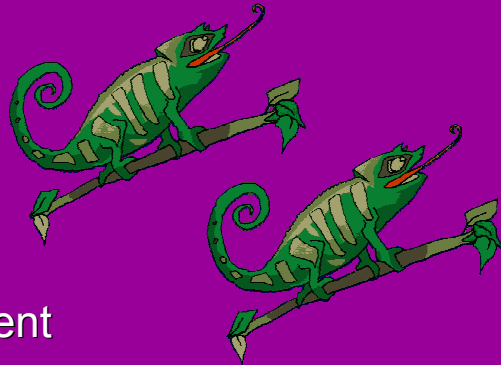
The **chameleon**
licked **its** eyeball.

chameleon = singular antecedent
its = singular pronoun



The **chameleons**
licked **their**
eyeballs.

chameleons = plural antecedent
their = plural pronoun



Know the difference between these *singular* and *plural* pronouns.

Singular

- He, she, it
- Him, her, it
- His, hers, its
- Himself, herself, itself

Plural

- They
- Them
- Their, theirs
- Themselves



Do not confuse *it's*
with *its*.

- *It's* [with an apostrophe] means *it is* or *it has*.
- *Its* [without an apostrophe] means *belonging to it*--for example, *its* bowl, *its* sharp teeth, *its* long claws, etc.
- Possessive pronouns--unlike possessive nouns--do not need an apostrophe with the final *s*.

Rule 2, Part 1: The conjunction *and* can cause problems with pronoun agreement.



Two [or more] singular things joined by *and* become a ***plural*** antecedent called a compound subject.

The new puppy *and* kitten have destroyed *their* owner's sofa.




Rule 2, Part 2: When *each* or *every* precedes the compound subject [singular things joined by *and*], a *singular* antecedent is formed. Use a *singular* pronoun to match.





Each new puppy *and* kitten destroys *its* owner's sofa.





No matter *how many* singular nouns you join with *and*, the antecedent is *still* singular. Use a *singular* pronoun to match.



Each new puppy, kitten, antula, python, parrot, iguana. *It* destroys *its* owner's sofa.



Rule 3: Use caution with these three conjunctions: *either ... or*, *neither ... nor*, and *not only ... but also*.

Of the two antecedents you will find, the pronoun must agree with the closer one.

Here are two examples:

Not only Luis but also the **Smiths** fixed **their** famous squid eyeball stew for the picnic.


Not only the Smiths but also **Luis** fixed **his** famous squid eyeball stew for the picnic.



***Indefinite pronouns* cause the biggest headaches for pronoun agreement.**



Rule 4, Part 1: These *indefinite pronouns* are always *singular* [even when they *seem* plural].

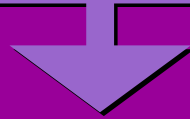


- Each, either, neither
- Anyone, anybody, anything
- No one, nobody, nothing
- Someone, somebody, something

**Everyone on Earth = *more than* one person.
The word *everyone*, however, is still *singular*.**



Rule 4, Part 2: When fixing an agreement error, try to avoid *sexist language* that might *offend* your readers.

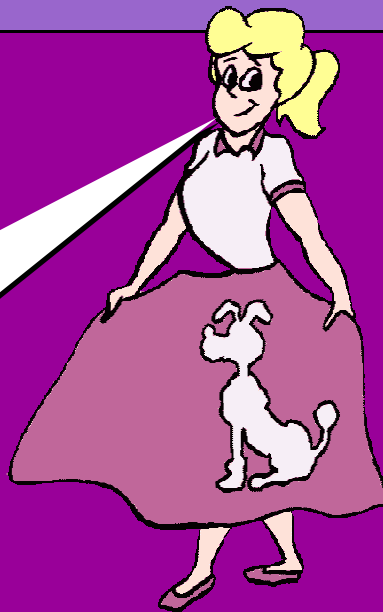


The sentence below sounds natural but has an error.

Someone left *their* lights on.

In the 1950s, rule books would have recommended using the *masculine* pronoun exclusively.

Oh, my!
Someone left
his backpack.



In the 1970s, after criticism from feminists, rule books next suggested using *both* genders so that *males and females* had *equal representation* in the language.

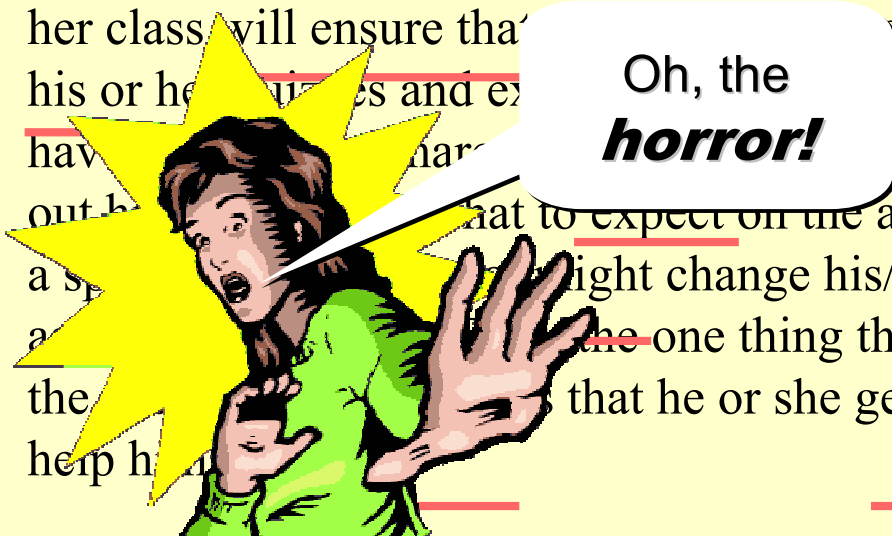
Someone left *his or her* backpack.



**A writer who begins with
he or she or *him or her*
will need to be consistent
throughout the paper.
Look what happens ...**

Student Success

If a student wants to improve his or her grades, he or she should walk himself or herself over to the tutoring center. There, he or she can request a tutor to help him or her with his or her homework. This preparation for his or her class will ensure that only when taking his or her the tutor might the student can find assignments for might change his/her one thing that will insure that he or she gets a tutor to help him or her.



In the 21st century, fix the error
without the annoying repetition.

There's a
backpack
someone
forgot.



Rule 4, Part 3: Some indefinite pronouns are *singular or plural*, depending on *context*.

- All
- Any
- None
- More
- Most
- Some

All of Beverly's hair gets **its** color from a bottle.

All of Beverly's fingernails get **their** color from a bottle.



Some *groups* of people, like a *jury*, also cause pronoun agreement *problems*.



Rule 5: *Collective nouns* are singular or plural, depending on *context*.



- Collective nouns are groups of people: *team, jury, class, committee, army, family*, etc.
- If all members are acting *in unison*, treat the collective noun as *singular* and use a *singular pronoun*.
- If, however, all members are acting *individually*, treat the noun as *plural* and use a *plural pronoun*.

Read these examples:

The **team** celebrated **its** victory.



The **team** changed into **their** street clothes and went home happy.


When you cannot *decide* if the collective noun is singular or plural, insert a *plural noun* after the collective noun, like this:



The *team members* ran out onto the field to meet *their* opponent.



Rule 6: *Companies, organizations, and schools* are *singular* and thus require *singular* pronouns.



One urban legend is that *McDonald's* makes *its* hamburgers with kangaroo meat.

The *World Wildlife Fund* uses the donations *it* receives to trample the rights of third-world people who share the habitat of endangered animals.

Next year, *Valencia Community College* will try to solve *its* parking woes by requiring students to buy a \$75 parking decal.

The End.